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The Front Door

While senators and their subcommittees and their counsel and their investigators continue to bar the back door against any possibility that military secrets will be shipped out to other nations, the old front-door problem remains—how much weapons information should the American public be told directly, for its own good? This is, of course, a problem peculiar to no one administration, and it will never be solved by any one sweeping action. It is a pressing matter today; tomorrow it could subside or it could be worse.

Immediately, there are these tangentially related aspects: one, a boatload of Japanese fishermen, and fish, were coated with an ineradicable gray ash—radioactive ash—early this month because they had no warning of an explosion, and adverse winds, when they sailed close to, but apparently not inside, a test area. Two, the chairman of the congressional Joint Atomic Energy Committee announces that this country has the hydrogen bomb and can deliver it; a development long suspected by the public but confirmed by what looks somewhat like one-man action. Three, the Defense Department announces new types and models of airplanes and guided missiles in a "production record" that apparently was released without thought to this larger news, classified up until now, contained in it.

Only the other day, Mr. Allen W. Dulles, director of the Central Intelligence Agency, told interviewers that: "Sometimes I think we go too far in what our Government gives out officially and in what is published in the scientific and technical field." He added that he wished he knew "as much about the Soviet Union as the Soviet Union can learn about us by merely reading" various official and unofficial announcements.

The old problem of "security," of bolting the back doors, will always be with us. But an exclusive preoccupation with it can lead to at least as serious a tangle elsewhere, in the nation's formal news dissemination. Senators with unspent zeal could profitably assist in maintaining some sort of co-ordination on what the public should know and when and through which channels.

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